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ABSTRACT

This bulletin describes the success of a partnership between the National Training and Dissemination Program (NTDP) and the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (Tennessee). Beginning in October, 1992, the NTDP provided Nashville with technical, staff, and financial assistance as well as law-related education (LRE) resources. Nashville schools cooperated in developing a pilot program for one of the district's 11 kindergarten through grade 12 clusters. The five-step strategy that the NTDP followed in implementing the program, a strategy that begins with needs assessment, is outlined. After formulating a mission statement and goals intended to fulfill the needs of the school district, the development team designed curriculum guidelines. To promote faculty training, a key to the project's success, the district encouraged teachers to schedule LRE staff development sessions to fulfill their annual staff development requirement. The training sessions involved teachers, administrators, parents, and community leaders. In the belief that community involvement is an essential element of LRE, the development team initiated several outreach efforts. Attorneys were encouraged to visit their assigned schools and meet students informally. The article concludes with suggestions for interested readers to develop their own LRE programs. (JD)

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Technical Assistance Bulletin No. 11

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Bulletin

American Bar Association Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools: An LRE Laboratory

by George S. Perry, Jr.

A partnership between the National Training and Dissemination Program (NTDP) and the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools has resulted in an "LRE laboratory" through which these schools, their community, and LRE professionals can better understand how to introduce and maintain law-related education programs in urban settings.

The process began in October 1992, when Metropolitan Nashville became the NTDP's local partner in its urban LRE project. As in any effective partnership, all parties will contribute to the project's overall success.

The NTDP will provide Nashville with technical, staff development, and financial assistance, as well as access to LRE resources. Nashville schools will contribute its understanding of the complex needs of area youth and its willingness to develop, participate in, and assess LRE across grades throughout the district. The local community will support the project through connections to the community-based projects and resources.

The pilot project is being conducted in one of the district's eleven kindergarten through grade 12 clusters, under the direction of a development team representing all constituencies: teachers, school and central office administrators; cluster parents and other community members; and NTDP staff. The team is responsible for designing and implementing the three main elements of the project, which include curriculum development, staff training, and community involvement. It forms policy, identifies and allocates resources, and coordinates activities and outreach. As the project progresses, this team will expand as needed.

Why Have an Urban LRE Project?

Educators nationwide are familiar with law-related education, but it is not a regular part of the urban school curriculum. For example, a 1992 Social Science Education Consortium study shows that 73 percent of responding urban districts had LRE in their curriculum guides. (Social Science Education Consortium June 1992. Final Report—Survey of Urban School Districts Regarding Current Law-Related Education Programs). Yet actual kindergarten to grade 12 programs were difficult to find.

Difficult challenges face urban youth, and there's common agreement that LRE can help to meet them. The NTDP's Law-Related Education in Urban Settings project is dedicated to examining the influence LRE can have on urban youth, as well as ways to successfully introduce LRE programs into urban settings.

In January 1992, after reviewing research on school restructuring efforts, successful urban school programs, and changing urban demographics, the NTDP combined the research findings with its own considerable experience to design a multi-year project to blend LRE into the curriculum of restructured urban schools. The implementation design has three key features:

It is *collaborative*, drawing on local, state, and national resources.

It is *needs based*, focusing on identifying and addressing participants' needs.

It is *comprehensive*, examining curricular and cocurricular programs, as well as school- and community-based programs.

What Is the NTDP?

The NTDP is a cooperative program supported by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. Five national organizations participate in the NTDP: the American Bar Association Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship, the Center for Civic Education, the Constitutional Rights Foundation, the National Institute for Citizen Education in the Law, and the Phi Alpha Delta Public Service Center. NTDP-supported LRE projects exist in 48 states, the District of Columbia, and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico.

Nashville's 5-Step Process

Step 1: Needs Assessment

To focus the project's direction, the development team began by identifying and clarifying student and teacher/community needs that LRE can address.

Students Working with faculty, the team identified these important student needs across all grade levels.

- understanding rules and the consequences of breaking them
- increasing contact with positive role models
- improving decision-making skills
- developing self-discipline skills by strengthening the sense of responsibility for their actions
- enhancing communication and conflict-resolution skills
- participating in rule- and policy-making decisions
- increasing self-esteem
- developing positive values

Teachers/Community Teachers needs included encouragement in using LRE, substantive information about the law, suggestions on incorporating LRE into the existing curriculum, and examples of LRE teaching strategies.

Informing parents about the law and offering a vehicle for community involvement are community needs that the project should address.

The development team will continue to gather, evaluate, and integrate needs information, refining and reshaping the project during this school year.

Bulletin

American Bar Association Special Committee on Youth Education for Citizenship

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Step 2: Mission Statement and Goals

The development team proposed a mission statement and goals to articulate its vision for the project.

Mission Statement

This project empowers Metropolitan Nashville Public School students to recognize the challenges of living within a diverse urban population by developing the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to become effective participants who fulfill their rights and responsibilities in our constitutional democracy.

Project Goals

- ***To establish a comprehensive and sequential law-related education program for all students in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools.***
- ***To encourage the use of instructional strategies that prepare students to be active participants in our diverse society.***
- ***To engage community resources, particularly those from the legal and educational communities, in implementing an effective citizenship education program.***

Step 3: Curriculum Development

In February, curriculum work began when the development team created four grade-level working groups (K-3, 4-6, middle school, and high school). These groups include development-team faculty members as well as other interested faculty and staff.

The groups examined the needs generated by the development team to determine those most important to their grade levels. They identified programs, such as conflict-resolution programs, and activities that are already designed to address these needs, and they selected areas of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that should be their classrooms' most important focuses of work.

Together the four working groups suggested an outline for a grade-sequenced LRE program. Called the "curriculum framework," working groups opted to organize it around four of Metropolitan Nashville's district themes: achievement, citizenship, multiculturalism, and community involvement. The curriculum framework will define the themes, identify goals and objectives to clarify each, stipulate student outcomes that are measurable at grade levels, and suggest a range of curricular and cocurricular programs, lessons, activities, and strategies appropriate for each grade level.

The working groups are using the 1993-94 school year to write and field test LRE lessons and activities. During this development process, opportunities to share information are essential to address needs and to identify potential areas of collaboration between grade-level programs. Ideas and recommendations flow freely back and forth between the working groups and the development team to assure that the final product is coordinated.

Step 4: Faculty Training

The project's success is closely connected to adequate teacher content and strategy training prior to launch. As a visible example of its support for the project, the district encouraged teachers to schedule LRE staff development sessions to fulfill their annual staff development requirement. At cluster schools during the spring, the NTDP staff conducted demonstration lessons that furthered teacher, administrator, parent, and community understanding of LRE. Feedback on these lessons increased the NTDP staff's understanding of the types of lessons that are appropriate for Nashville students.

During the summer, as the writing of the curriculum framework continued, the NTDP staff gave teachers in the working groups additional LRE training to broaden their understanding of LRE curriculum and to help them design "awareness" training for other teachers prior to the start of school. Staff in all cluster schools received awareness training in LRE and this project before the start of school. "Lead" teachers in the working groups are becoming resources to other teachers interested in working LRE into their curriculums.

The NTDP staff and cluster teachers discuss the field-testing of lessons and the use of interactive teaching/learning strategies regularly. Lessons and strategies that work will be included in the curriculum framework.

As the framework is refined, a site-based staff development model will be used for training other educators and resource people. In this staff development model, teachers will observe and analyze LRE lessons demonstrated with students in their regular classrooms. Educators from other schools and resource persons will be encouraged to attend LRE classes conducted by the project's lead teachers as part of their staff development.

Step 5: Community Participation

Experience has shown that the community can be helpful in supporting the messages and information students receive during the school day, and that regular contact with legal professionals is a necessary element in changing student attitudes about the law and the legal system. Community members themselves can benefit from additional information about the law, which in turn will further student understanding and positive values. Therefore, community involvement is an essential element of LRE, and community outreach is an ongoing activity.

Coordination is necessary to assure the best use of a community's resources, and the Metropolitan Nashville development team has involved the community in several ways. Initial outreach efforts shared information and identified resources. A number of organizations are represented on the team, with others to be added as appropriate. Access to additional resources, joint program development, and increasingly active community-organization involvement are all outreach future priorities.

Training for resource persons is an essential consideration. Sessions on using interactive LRE lessons were conducted for attorneys and teachers. These sessions helped participants better understand the ways they could teach cooperatively. As a next step, attorneys were encouraged to visit their assigned schools and meet students informally. These steps have eased concerns about using unfamiliar teaching strategies.

About the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

The Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools—34th largest school district in the United States, with over 68,000 students in 121 schools—is involved in a systemwide process of change introduced by its new superintendent in July 1992.

The district is simultaneously experimenting with various innovations including site-based management, outcome-based assessment, and school-based programs such as conflict resolution. A significant staff development program has been instituted to facilitate change, and a comprehensive plan containing a mission, goals, and objectives is being developed to unify the district's service delivery.

Metropolitan Nashville receives considerable support from the rapidly expanding community. The Chamber of Commerce has examined the school district's operation and has determined that it is well-managed. The business community provides financial support to enhance staff skills. Legal professionals, parents, and community organizations contribute considerable resources to enhance school programs and broaden students' educational opportunities.

Because of a continuing court desegregation order, Metropolitan Nashville is structured into 11 school clusters. Each is a feeder system containing an elementary, middle, and high school. At present, the clusters are supported by a strong central administration. This organizational structure facilitates program implementation and management, as it separates the district into smaller, more manageable representative components.

Developing Your Own Urban LRE Program

The first year of this initiative has provided a better understanding of the ways LRE programs can play a larger role in more urban schools, and the Metropolitan Nashville project has furnished insights into the challenges involved. Some findings confirm what we already know about program development, while others indicate areas for further exploration. The preliminary results hold promise for the future.

Here are some useful tips for others wishing to start LRE programs in their urban schools.

Beware of Competing Interests

Urban school districts must contend with a variety of programs and pressures that compete for the attention of administrators, teachers, parents, and students. LRE project directors face the challenge of convincing the district of LRE's importance. Two complementary strategies may prove helpful.

First, before administrators and teachers commit to the program, make sure they are aware that the project will meet existing school needs. The results of needs assessments can identify the ways that the project benefits the school.

Second, it is difficult to capture a school staff's attention with projects that are not part of the district's current initiatives. The project director should be familiar with the district's philosophy/mission/core values and use this language to describe the project's connection. Connecting rather than competing makes the project more acceptable.

Involve Your Principal

The principal's support is a key element in successful program implementation, especially as urban districts move to site-based management, where principals and teachers have more authority to make curriculum and program decisions. We have found that principals are quick to appreciate the benefits of LRE, and that the degree to which the principal is involved is an indicator of a project's success.

It is particularly important to involve the principal at the very start of the project and show how the project connects with the school's needs and the district's initiatives. Principals will appreciate knowing the central administration's support for the project, the resources the project will provide to the school, and the time and commitment level needed from the principal and staff.

Make a Long-Term Commitment

It takes time to build a collaborative project that will survive in the face of competing interests. The process of identifying needs, developing working relationships, and understanding project elements at times seems frustratingly tedious. Participants change unexpectedly, often requiring covered ground to be retraced. Also, it takes a while to develop an appreciation for differences in working styles and approaches, whether or not participants have worked together previously.

A commitment to team building is a necessary element. Events that allow people to meet one another informally may be useful in building the interpersonal relationships that can drive a project. Patience and confidence in the group's ability, as well as commitment, contribute to the formation of the team.

Emphasize Staff Development

Teacher encouragement and support are key elements of project implementation, and teachers need to believe that the project will generate the intended results before they will invest their time. Observing lesson demonstrations with their students convinces them of the approach's merits. A commitment to staff development encourages teachers to become comfortable with new content and teaching strategies by asking questions, trying lessons and discussing their experiences with their peers and experienced trainers.

Build Community Involvement

When asked, community members are usually willing to lend their expertise to help children. But all resources have limitations. The coordination of community resources is necessary to maximize their contribution and minimize misunderstandings about "turf" issues. Parents, legal professionals, and other community participants need to know the specific ways that they can make a contribution and the extent of commitment proposed.

While it is difficult to provide specific information during the program development process, involving the community early on helps build momentum for the project. Use general awareness sessions, and press releases to give information about the project and to connect it to existing networks. In this way, the community can be involved from the beginning without making commitments before implementation. Finally, provide continual project updates to help community participants plan their involvement.

LRE Resources

To aid other urban school districts, and the state LRE projects that work with them, information about the Metropolitan Nashville project is available through LRE newsletters, publications, and reports; meetings with state and local LRE project directors; and presentations to other national organizations interested in urban education. For additional information call the National LRE Resource Center at 312/988-5735 or Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools at 615/259-8660.

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